

Summary of Comments from Town Hall Meetings

From February 28th to March 12th, the Mayor’s Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability conducted 5 Town Hall Meetings by borough. We sent invitations to more than 5000 community leaders, public officials, and clergy, who were encouraged to bring their constituents or other acquaintances. Approximately 600 people attended the meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to both inform the public about PLANYC and to receive their feedback on the Mayor’s “10 Goals for 2030.” Their suggestions and comments were collected during small-group

The following summary of the meeting comments are divided by each of the ten goals. The comments have been categorized by themes, listed in order of most popular to fewest comments.

HOUSING

Goal: Create homes for almost a million more New Yorkers, while making housing more affordable and sustainable

Maintain and Promote Affordable and Mixed-Income Housing

There was resounding support throughout all boroughs for preserving and increasing affordable and mixed-income housing, and comments expressed both general support and specific ideas for how to do so. Suggested tactics that received numerous remarks include:

- Expand or update existing affordable housing subsidies and programs such as the Section 8, Mitchell Lama and 80/20 split programs
- Protect and expand rent-controlled and stabilized housing
- Incentivize (e.g., with tax breaks) or require developers to set aside a certain percentage of affordable housing units in each development
- Expand or mandate inclusionary zoning
- Ensure that affordable housing is available and distributed throughout the boroughs as well as in “immigrant areas”
- Make home ownership more affordable by capping purchase prices or helping low-income individuals obtain mortgages
- Re-address and redefine “what affordable is for the lower and middle classes”
- “Protect the middle class and small businesses”

Individual suggestions included: “Increase education about affordability and home ownership”; “don’t build Atlantic Yards” and use funds to subsidize low income housing; “build fewer luxury condos,” and “leverage private capital through public investment to build low income housing.”

Increase Housing Supply

Several participants suggested that remediated brownfields be used to build more housing. Others agreed that upzoning should be encouraged “where appropriate” and “where infrastructure can support it,” and that rezoning be done for underutilized industrial areas. There was, however, a suggestion to “downzone Manhattan.” A few participants agreed that new housing could be made available by decking over infrastructure (such as rail yards or the Gowanus/BQE) or building apartments on top of libraries and retail stores. There were also a few calls for more waterfront housing. Some more creative suggestions to expand housing supply include promoting more house sharing and house boats, converting parking garages to housing, using city facilities to house the homeless, converting abandoned housing for ownership, and “recogniz[ing] ‘illegal’ conversions as actually being beneficial to the city.”

Maintain Neighborhood Character

Many participants agreed that further development should “ensure new building is in context with existing areas” and should not displace current residents. Several suggestions were made to incorporate aesthetic requirements for new construction, to restrict tall buildings to wide streets or where they will not cast shadows, and to generally increase quality of existing and new housing (including tearing down abandoned or condemned buildings).

Build social infrastructure commensurate with new housing

Numerous participants emphasized that “social infrastructure” must be improved and developed in conjunction with housing construction planning, including parks and community facilities, hospitals/healthcare, education and after-school programs. Numerous comments also specifically addressed the importance of concentrating housing development around existing transit hubs and job centers (particularly job centers and commercial districts in outer boroughs) to increase convenience and reduce commuting time. Furthermore, several requests were made to increase community planning and communication during the building process, including involving immigrants in the decision-making process.

Codes, Policies and City Agencies

Some participants raised the need to simplify the building code (“so it is written in plain English” or “along the lines of the International Building Code”) and to enforce housing codes. With respect to property taxes, comments suggested greater tax control, tax increases, and that changes be based on “square footage, not income.” Individual suggestions were also made to improve inter-agency communication, simplify permitting, prevent eminent domain, protect renters, reduce lobbying of city officials by developers, increase DCP staff, “crack down on property speculators and scam artists,” and “stop tax exempt development.”

Green Buildings

Many comments were made in support for “more environmentally friendly buildings,” including for affordable green housing. Specific suggestions were made to “put sustainability practices into the building code” and to incentivize green developments (e.g., with tax abatement).

Miscellaneous

Individual miscellaneous suggestions included: promote “shared resource space: food/energy co-ops,” use prefabricated housing to reduce costs, and reduce dependence on union labor.

CONGESTION

Goal: Improve travel times by adding transit capacity for millions more residents, visitors, and workers

Improve and Encourage Use of Mass Transit Options

The greatest number of congestion comments were offered in support of mass transit as the top solution for easing congestion.

- **Incentives and Infrastructure Improvements:** To encourage greater use of mass transit, the most common suggestion was to modernize our subway/bus equipment and infrastructure and to “improve the travel experience on public transit.” With respect to subways and buses, there were numerous calls for increased frequency of service, affordability (e.g., reduced fares, “prorate Metrocard according to poverty/income”) and financial incentives (e.g., “reevaluate Transit Check program” and “build disincentives to car travel”), efficiency (e.g., “faster-scanning Metrocards”), cleanliness, improved usability (e.g., “implement timing announcements in subway”), more park and ride systems, and other “passenger amenities at transit hubs.” Other individual suggestions included: “be sure public transportation can serve non-English speaking immigrants,” “decrease availability of private transportation,” and “implement a bus hub-and-spoke system.”
- **Specific Transit Types:** There was widespread support for increasing the number, frequency and quality of all forms of mass transit. Numerous participants strongly encouraged implementing a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system (“dedicate lanes”...“and make it work”), increasing buses and bus speeds (especially express buses with dedicated lanes), significantly increasing ferry service and other waterborne transit for commuter and freight (e.g., water taxis), building light rail, encouraging pedicabs, and expanding the subway system (and “make the subways world-class with higher quality service”). Individual suggestions were made to implement trolleys and an integrated regional rail system as well as to “reduce the number of NYU buses.”
- **Geographic Areas and Specific Transit Lines:** The most commonly-mentioned transit line was the 2nd Avenue subway, with numerous requests by participants from Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens for extensions into their boroughs and timely project completion. Participants from all boroughs also made general and specific requests for improving transit to the outer boroughs and within them.

Each borough provided several specific solutions or transit lines (spanning all transit modes) needing attention in their neighborhoods, such as “reopen the closed LIRR stations in Queens,” “expand rail freight line in the Bronx to include passenger rail,” “build light rails across 14th to 125th streets” (Manhattan), “reopen the Rockaway Beach line” (Queens), and “North Shore and West Shore public transit needs to be developed” (Staten Island). Individuals also raised the need for better transit options to airports and for more transit-oriented housing development.

Increase Biking and Walking

Comments offered strong support for improving the “walkability and bikeability of the city.” Several themes were echoed by participants, including:

- Enhance biking infrastructure (e.g., dedicated and physically-separated bike lanes, incentives or requirements for indoor and outdoor bike parking/storage facilities, coordinated traffic signals, methods “for buses and subways to transport bikes,” and a well-developed bikeway network)
- Improve pedestrian infrastructure (e.g., “reduce sidewalk obstructions,” “raised sidewalks and pedestrian overpasses”)
- Promote safety measures for bikers and pedestrians (e.g., enforce bike traffic rules, “more NYPD attention to bike theft”)
- Encourage and educate people on benefits of walking and biking. Ideas include giving landlords tax breaks for providing indoor parking and to “implement a city bike sharing program like Zipcar.”

Limit Parking and Discourage Car Use

Many comments offered support and ideas for reducing congestion through limiting parking and discouraging car use. The most popular suggestions were for implementing congestion pricing, promoting carpooling such as through more HOV lanes, making it more expensive or difficult to park by encouraging market rates, decreasing spots or enforcing parking laws, reinstating the commuter tax, decreasing large “gas guzzlers and SUVs” with taxes or surcharges, establishing more car-free streets, and tolling the East River Bridges. Individual comments included eliminating free parking for city officials, discouraging city employees from driving, “finding ways for people to work closer to where they live,” and “eliminating car traffic into Manhattan.”

Improve Roads and Driving

Some suggestions were made to improve the roads and driving experience in the City. There were shared sentiments regarding the need to enforce current traffic rules and improve road safety (particularly for school children through the Safe Routes to School program). Specific individual suggestions to improve traffic flow included a new tunnel from Brooklyn to Manhattan, “Staten Island needs wider roads,” “more one way streets and avenues,” “make taxis wait on corners, not drive around,” “two-way tolling on the Verrazano Bridge,” and “expand reverse commute capacity.”

Freight/Commercial Traffic

Suggestions for ameliorating the role of congestion played by freight/commercial traffic included: incentivize or mandate off-peak or alternative delivery times, “use the water network to get trucks off the road,” “close off some streets to private vehicle traffic,” and “build the Cross Harbor Freight Tunnel.”

Miscellaneous

Several participants encouraged flextime, staggered workdays and telecommuting to reduce rush hour loads. A few also supported incentivizing commercial development and promoting job creation in outer boroughs to reduce commute times. A few remarks highlighted the importance of promoting fuel/energy efficiency, cleanliness (in terms of air pollution) and overall sustainability of the City's subways, buses and taxis. Individual miscellaneous comments included: "build underwater moving sidewalks," "allow citizens to issue traffic tickets," "link transportation growth to expected population growth," and tear down underused roads. A question raised was: "how will displaced persons be compensated if North Shore RR is built?"

PARKS

Goal: Ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a park

Specific Ideas for Park Venues

Numerous participants offered the following ideas for park venues: building more green roofs and rooftop parks and “ensure they are publicly accessible,” remediating brownfields, adding community gardens, providing schools and schoolyards as off-hour parks and “recreation centers,” creating “pocket parks and plazas,” planting greenways along waterfronts, converting parking spaces to “sidewalk cafes/parks,” and replacing the Sheridan Expressway with a greenway. Several comments simply suggest “greening the streets with more plants and trees.”

Individual ideas for conversion to parks or other types of recreation areas included: “car-free Sundays on Grand Concourse,” Pier 40, “make private gardens public,” linear parks next to the Staten Island highways, and “complete plans to convert Brookfield and Fresh Kills landfills into parks.”

Require or Incentivize Developers to Build Parks

Numerous participants encouraged the city to incentivize or require developers to “have set asides for parks,” “green spaces,” or other recreational areas. A specific idea raised was to “compel developers to contribute to an open space fund.” Another comment suggested the parks should be protected from development.

Improve the Park System

Many participants emphasized the importance of improving, maintaining and cleaning existing parks as well as maximizing “universal accessibility” (both in terms of being located near transit modes and being public vs. private parks). A few shared the sentiment for increased “community input with regards to park design” and for connecting parks “to create a total system.” Individual ideas included: establish a “lottery for gardens in parks,” “increase water retention areas in parks,” more dog amenities, more money for “park stewardship and youth programs,” “get cars out of parks,” “staff parks with recreational aides,” and “curtail large or private institutions dominating parks.”

Additional miscellaneous suggestions included: eliminate artificial grass use, cluster health care facilities near parks, “expand agricultural education at community gardens,” and build hospitals, schools and senior housing instead of parks.

WATER NETWORK

Goal: Develop critical back-up systems for our aging water network to ensure long-term reliability

Improve Water Infrastructure and Administration

“Finish 3rd water tunnel” was the most prevalent comment related to improving the City’s water infrastructure, and in one case, the text which followed said “and then immediately upgrade old tunnels.” Other shared remarks were to repair/upgrade plumbing in older buildings, “fix leaks city wide,” and expand water quality monitoring. Individual suggestions included: promote “distributed water storage” (with a separate specific comment to “use the Brooklyn-Queens aquifer for long-term emergency water storage”) and “establish a wireless water metering system to free up manpower and increase maintenance.”

Encourage Sustainable Alternatives

Numerous participants offered support for reducing the strain on our potable water resources by utilizing graywater and rainwater for non-potable uses. Specific ideas included: tax credits for graywater or rainwater harvesting and use, requirement that graywater be used for landscape irrigation, and even creation of a “dedicated graywater water network.” Several comments were made to investigate the feasibility of desalination as an alternative water source.

Protect Our Water Sources

Numerous comments also addressed the importance of protecting the upstate watershed. Individual suggestions included: “use new technologies to increase water supply,” “explore water resources to the west of the city,” and “expand use of natural systems for flood control and pollution control.”

Promote Conservation and Efficiency

Many participants supported efforts to encourage water conservation and efficiency. Individual suggestions included: incentivize low flow toilets, use “new technologies to recycle, conserve and supply water,” increase conservation education programs, and charge more for water to promote conservation.

STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

Goal: Reach a full “state of good repair” on New York City’s roads, subways, and rails for the first time in history

Lessen Road Damage by Reducing Traffic

Many participants provided suggestions for lessening road damage by reducing traffic. The greatest emphasis related to stimulating more mass transit use by improving availability throughout all boroughs, overall riding experience (e.g., “modernize the subway,” “make the subways rat-free”), and accessibility (particularly for senior and disabled access). Another area of emphasis was on disincentivizing and reducing truck traffic, with ideas such as moving more freight by rail or water and enforcing truck weight rules.

Other common remarks included: encourage biking and walking, implement financial disincentives to driving (through higher tolls, commuter tax and congestion pricing), increase cost and inconvenience of parking, and make certain streets or NYC as a whole “car free.” Individuals suggested disincentivizing “big box retail stores” and promoting “better jobs/housing balance throughout the city.”

Increase Funding, Improve Maintenance

Participants stressed the need to “stop deferring maintenance” and to “reinforce existing infrastructure before building more.” They offered ideas for specific repairs needed, such as cobblestone streets in historic areas, potholes, bridges, catch basins and drainage issues. Specific suggestions for funding maintenance and repairs included: congestion pricing, MTA surpluses, “look at sponsorship,” dedicated tolls, “tax credits or bounties for potholes filled,” and “get Federal and State governments to pay their fair share.”

Improve Policies and Public Agency Administration

Several comments offered a variety of policy and administrative suggestions to achieve a state of good repair. Shared ideas included: enforce truck traffic and weight rules, make contractors accountable for their work, and reduce traffic speeds through improved traffic light timing and operations. Individual suggestions for improved administration included: “stop using bonds for operating funds,” “reinforce tax collection mechanisms to prevent cheating,” “coordinate road construction with DOT to minimize traffic disruptions,” “have local small businesses work on small road projects,” and “better inspection via surveillance cameras.”

Miscellaneous individual remarks included: “plan for pedestrians,” “put signage in landmarked neighborhoods,” “improve bus scheduling to airports,” “create a ‘teaching fellows’ program for environmental engineers,” and “create pervious pavement surfaces.”

ENERGY

Goal: Provide cleaner, more reliable power for every New Yorker by upgrading our energy infrastructure

Increase Sustainable Energy Alternatives

Participants in all boroughs showed tremendous support for the city's diversification to renewable and other alternative energy sources, with numerous calls for exploring, incentivizing or expanding the City's use of solar, wind, tidal, hydro, geothermal, biomass, waste conversion, biodiesel, and cogeneration technologies. Several support the development of distributed generation (using some of the aforementioned technologies as well as fuel cells). One discussion group suggested "explore nuclear energy" while another remarked "don't consider nuclear energy."

Ideas provided to effect or encourage such diversification included: allow consumers to purchase green power through Con Ed, allow for net metering (including commercial net metering), place solar collectors on street lights, and expand tax credits for solar power.

Promote Energy Conservation and Efficiency

Numerous participants from Brooklyn and Manhattan emphasized the need to "promote energy efficiency everywhere" and identify suitable conservation practices. Shared remarks were directed at more efficient lighting (e.g., "use LEDs or CFLs for street lighting," "incorporate smart controls"), heating/cooling (e.g., "make a law against air conditioning waste," "retrofit thermostats for tenant control of utilities") and appliances ("subsidize use of energy efficient appliances"). Several suggested reducing peak electricity demand and incorporating energy-efficient green building practices into construction requirements.

Miscellaneous

Several suggestions were made regarding each of these three issues: (1) Upgrade the electric grid, re-power old power plants, and update the grid with advanced, cleaner, more efficient technology. (2) Consider environmental justice issues such as more equitable power plant siting and assistance to small and/or immigrant businesses that are disproportionately harmed by blackouts. (3) Ameliorate air pollution caused by power plants by penalizing polluting power producers and retrofitting power plants to meet clean air standards.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Goal: Reduce global warming emissions by more than 30%

Reduce Vehicular Emissions

The greatest number of suggestions for this goal addressed the reduction of vehicle emissions by: incentivizing vehicles using cleaner fuels or hybrid technology (with particular mentions of targeting city fleets, taxis and buses), promoting biking and walking by improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure, enforcing idling laws, increasing the use of mass transit, and reducing car usage.

Reduce Emissions from Buildings

Participants from all boroughs also voiced support for improving the energy efficiency and environmental performance of buildings. The most common suggestions included: “build more green roofs,” “expand and enforce the Green Building Law,” encourage or require the use of compact fluorescent lighting, improve efficiency of heating and cooling systems, turn lights off in city/school/commercial buildings at night, and generally retrofit buildings to be more energy efficient. There was an individual suggestion to “increase education amongst developers and landlords.”

Promote Conservation, Recycling and Education

The next most common category of suggestions involved the promotion of environmental education and consciousness, with a focus on educating the public about global warming and its effects (with particular mention of students and landlords), promoting composting (with a suggestion that composting be “specifically managed by the Department of Sanitation), increasing and improving recycling, emphasizing conservation and reuse of products, and encouraging businesses and the city (which “should be a role model”) to purchase “recycled goods” or “green supplies.” An individual also suggested that “green purchasing patterns” be encouraged in general.

Miscellaneous

Numerous calls were made to “expand tree plantings” and other vegetative cover throughout the City. Policy-oriented suggestions included: implement a carbon tax, “use market-based techniques to control emissions,” and “promote environmental pricing versus market pricing of goods.” Several participants also pointed to increasing alternative energy sources such as solar (“give major tax breaks or incentives”), vertical wind turbines, hydro, tidal, and waste-to-energy. With respect to increased violent storms or rising sea levels due to global warming, participants called for better preparedness measures and education.

AIR QUALITY

Goal: Achieve the cleanest air of any big city in America

Decrease Vehicular Emissions and Pollutants

More than half of the suggestions for improving air quality addressed the need to reduce vehicular emissions and pollutants. The most common category of ideas relate to increasing the use of alternative vehicles and fuels, such as: incentivize/mandate taxis, buses and city fleets to be electric or other hybrid vehicles; support biodiesel; encourage pedicabs and other “non-motorized transport;” and designate “sustainable vehicle lanes.” Other common suggestions involved promoting biking and walking with improved bike and pedestrian infrastructure, encouraging or mandating less-polluting trucks, enforcing idling laws, facilitating mass transit use, and discouraging driving through decreased parking availability or “car free days in certain areas.” A few calls were made to tax “gas guzzlers,” SUVs, and SUV limos.

Plant More Trees and Protect Open Space

Participants from all boroughs also strongly supported increasing the City’s tree canopy and open space, with suggestions including: provide tax credits for planting trees, promote green roofs (such as “on all city buildings”) and green streets, and “build more open space, protect it from development.”

Miscellaneous

Common miscellaneous comments included: increase recycling and conservation, “encourage alternative forms of power,” expand the Green Building Law, and increase air quality monitoring (including mobile emissions testing). Individual ideas included: “focus resources on worst neighborhoods first,” “implement a gas tax and dedicate funds to health care,” and “work with neighboring states to clean our downwind air.”

BROWNFIELDS

Goal: Clean up all contaminated land in New York City

Prevent Future Contamination

The most common suggestions involved the prevention of future contamination, with a focus on improving/expanding recycling, decreasing the creation of non-biodegradable waste, reducing excess packaging and use of plastic bags, and holding polluters and manufacturers who generate waste responsible for their actions.

Cleaning Up Brownfields

Several participants suggested ways to fund and/or expedite remediation, including: “sell land for \$1 to developers willing to pay for cleanup,” “require developers to pay into a brownfields redevelopment fund,” and provide tax breaks to lower remediation costs. A few participants also agreed on promoting bioremediation and on fining polluters or making them responsible for cleanup costs. Individual ideas included: “prioritize brownfield clean up in low income communities” and “be mindful of spoils disposal: where will the toxic dirt and dust end up?”

Miscellaneous

With respect to the use of remediated brownfields, individuals suggested housing, *affordable* housing, and parks. Individuals supported “blue collar job creation on brownfield sites” and “community involvement in post-cleanup plans for land.” Policy and administrative suggestions included: “enforce current rules and make rules more stringent,” “revisit brownfield legislation,” give extra LEED points for NYC brownfield construction, and “look at new insurance laws that provide protection” for brownfield purchases. Individual suggestions also included: introduce “green responsibility education in schools,” “endow a green infrastructure chair at CUNY,” and “buy the NASCAR site, conserve as open space.”

WATER QUALITY

Goal: Open 90% of our waterways for recreation by reducing water pollution and preserving our natural areas

Reduce Pollution and Storm Water Runoff

The most common suggestion for improving the City's water quality was to reduce storm water runoff through increased permeable surfaces, green roofs, graywater usage, rainwater harvesting, and street trees. To reduce pollutants and litter from entering our waterways, participants suggested reducing street salting, banning pesticide use in the city, educating people about natural cleaning products, and controlling street littering.

Enhance Waterfront and Ferry Access

Participants voiced strong support for prioritizing waterfront development and improving public access to waterfronts and waterways. Ideas included: create more parks, public piers, bluebelts and other public recreation spaces along the waterfront; "create more park alliances;" and increase community involvement on waterfront issues. A few individuals asked for increased ferry service (including "explore hydrofoil ferries"), allowing kayak crossings, and "more non-motorized boat launches on the East River." Individual comments also included: "increase and stabilize wetlands," "plant native species along shoreline," "mitigate the effects of dredging," and "use bioremediation and natural methods to clean up waterways," such as using oyster beds to facilitate water filtration.

Reduce Combined Sewage Overflows

Numerous participants emphasized the need to "reduce CSO events," with individual ideas such as: obtain federal government funding for sewage infrastructure, build "a separate storm and sanitary sewer system," use "low impact development and non structural alternatives," and "pay for water treatment plants for secondary and tertiary pollution."